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ABSTRACT

This project-in-progress is one of several stages of the National Swedish Board of Universities and Colleges followup of the national reform of higher education. The overall object of the project is to study the manner in which the higher education system has adapted to the principle of recurrent education. It will entail following Swedish and international discussions of recurrent education and conducting case studies and statistical profiles with a view to providing a rough outline of the system's adaptation process. (Author/MSE)

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CURRENT PROJECT 1977:13

PROJECT TITLE: The Adaption of Universities and Colleges to Recurrent Education

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BACKGROUND

This project comprises one of several stages of the UHÄ follow-up of the Swedish reform of higher education. The overall object of this project is to study the manner in which the system of higher education has adapted to the principle of recurrent education. The project was recently initiated and the ideas outlined here must be considered as being preliminary. In the light of this, it will be one of the first tasks of the project to penetrate Swedish and international discussions on recurrent education, and to conduct case studies and compile statistical summaries with a view to providing a rough outline of how Swedish universities and colleges have adapted to recurrent education.

When these bases are prepared it will be possible to form opinions on any fields studies which may be carried out.

One major object of the Swedish reform of higher education is to adjust the educational organization, study methods and contents to the needs of new learners (Dahllöf, 1977). In this context one of the goals for our project is to clarify to what extent the Swedish system of higher education has responded to these needs.

ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF RECURRENT EDUCATION IN RELATION TO OBJECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Swedish Act of Higher Education indicates that the primary task of higher education is to provide the labour market with qualified labour and to satisfy varying individual requirements, and to plan education in accordance with the principles of recurrent education. In the light of this we will briefly examine the concept of recurrent education and occupational preparation.

Recurrent education

Recurrent education has to an increasing extent come to be regarded as a universal solution to most of the problems presently facing the educational system. But there appear to be very varied opinions as to what such a system should in actual fact include. Like so many other terms recurrent education is a diffuse concept. The OECD gives the following definition of recurrent education:

> "Recurrent education is a comprehensive educational strategy for all post-compulsory or post-basic education, the essential characteristic of which is the distribution of education over the total lifespan of the individual in a recurring way, i.e. in alternation with other activities, principally with work, but also with leisure and retirement."
>
> (CERI, 1973, p 16)

Recurrent education is intended to comprise a uniform system for three sectors which are at present separate: secondary and postsecondary education, adult education including general education, and education provided within companies. It is essential that this is emphasized, since recurrent education has far too often been regarded primarily as an opportunity of creating educational means for adults parallel with the traditional system. (Cf Nilsson & Rubenson, 1977.)

However, there are several ways of alternating work and higher education (cf Bengtsson, 1972). Figure 1 shows a few main lines. Obviously, several different combinations are possible and alternation can be repeated several times during the life of the indi-

vidual. Also studies could be conducted on a part-time basis and in combination with work, for example.

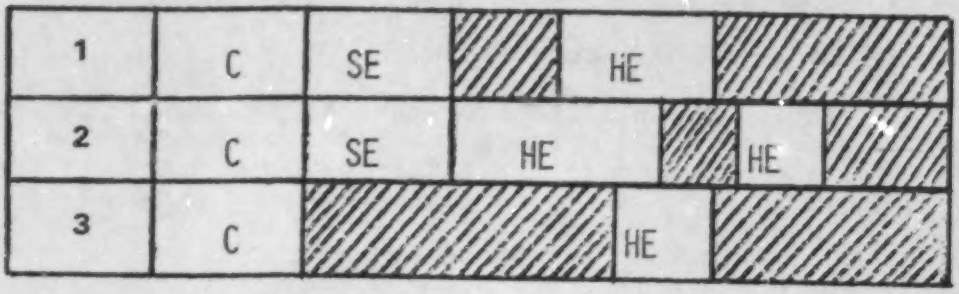

Figure 1. Alternative means of recurrent education for college education

C = compulsory education
SE = upper secondary education
HE = higher education
▨ = gainful employment

The basis of figure 1 is that the majority of pupils will also in the future move directly from compulsory school to secondary education and that alternation in a wider sense will take place first between upper secondary education and higher education.

Alternative 1 differs from the traditional course of studies only in that studies have been postponed. How common this will become depends very much on entrance requirements. Achieving a postponement has in general proved a difficult stage on the road towards the establishment of recurrent education (CERI, 1975). In this context it should be emphasized that economists of education hold varying opinions regarding what gains (pedagogic, economic and distributory) a postponement can involve. Stoikov, who concurs with the intentions of recurrent education, warns us against postponing higher education more than two or three years, since this cause the negative effects to become predominant (Stoikov, 1975). A particular difficulty involved in a postponement is that the labour market is not adjusted to it.

If economists appear to hold varying opinions regarding the profitability in letting young people postpone their college education, there seems to be a certain measure of agreement as regards the justification in concentrating on the education of adults, alternatives 2 - 3 in figure 1 (cf Blaug & Mace, 1977).

Alternative 2 in figure 1 deals mainly with graduates seeking a somewhat shorter course in the interests of further education. This is also often the case in

alternative 3, but with the difference that alternative 3 involves people relatively unaccustomed to studying and interested in these shorter courses.

Occupational preparation

It is essential to note that occupational preparation is not a uniform concept but one which must be considered in the light of where the individual is in his life cycle. In the case of some people education may comprise a first stage of a "career", while in the case of others it comprises a stage of an existing occupational activity. Those coming directly from upper secondary education or who have been gainfully employed for a brief period, are generally at the beginning of a "career". In the case of adult students, this may involve people who wish to change to a new "career" or to start one (e.g. people who have previously worked at home) and people who intend to acquire an education as part of an existing occupation. It is highly probable that these groups will impose partially varied demands on the occupational connection and layout of their studies (cf Kamienski, 1975).

As indicated by the above, it is essential that an evaluation of how colleges have adapted to recurrent education considers the alternative means of alternating work and education that we have mentioned.

ANALYSIS LEVELS

The ability of colleges to live up to the intentions of recurrent education depends not only on measures taken within the educational system, but also on developments in the labour market and the formulation of social policy. An accurate penetration of the whole complex is not possible within the framework of a project of this kind. This does not mean, however, that we can entirely ignore conditions in working life and forms of financing, for example, when examining how colleges have adapted to recurrent education.

Therefore, as a part of our planning work, we have initiated what may be termed a "mini-analysis" of the prerequisites for recurrent education. On the basis of an examination of the aims of college education, factors stimulating and impeding recurrent education will be studied. In this context we find ourselves at an intersection between different disciplines such as the theory of behaviour sciences, economy and political science. The mini-analysis is intended to describe how different sectors are interconnected. An outline structure of the kind thereby obtained comprises a base for comparing the results

of various studies in this field and viewing them in relation to the entire complex of recurrent education as well as imposing the restrictions necessary in this project.

A new aspect of the Swedish reform is that a greater measure of interest has been accorded the regional planning problems, inter alia by a division of Sweden into regions and the establishment of regional boards and regional secretariats. In addition, organizational changes have been introduced at higher education level, on educational line level and on institutional level. In future planning of the project, the selection of level must be further defined, although interest has hitherto been primarily concentrated on organizational level and institutional level.

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

It is perfectly clear that supply, content and information are basic factors in the adaption of colleges to recurrent education. An important task of this project therefore must be to chart the changes introduced by colleges in respect of supply, information etc.

The recruiting of new categories of students is not only a question of an increased channelling of resources to the neglected groups. It is also a case of creating a supply relevant to the situation in which these groups find themselves. There is a tendency to regard education as an isolated phenomenon, often divorced from the situation in which individuals or groups are living (cf Rubenson, 1977).

INSTITUTIONS

The organizational measures taken with a view to facilitating recurrent education are necessary but inadequate if the layout and targeting of education is not in accordance with the demands imposed by the new student groups it is intended to reach, the reform will not have the desired effect. One of the objects of the planned survey is to chart the extent to which courses are adapted to the demands of the adult students. In this context we cannot limit ourselves to letting the students comment on how they feel about the content of their courses, but we must also note what objectives have dictated the actions of the institution, what procedures have been applied in the selection of literature etc. It is also essential that the content be discussed and commented by representatives of the intended target groups.

Figure 2 summarizes the bases for that part of the survey involving content as seen in the light of demands for occupational preparations.

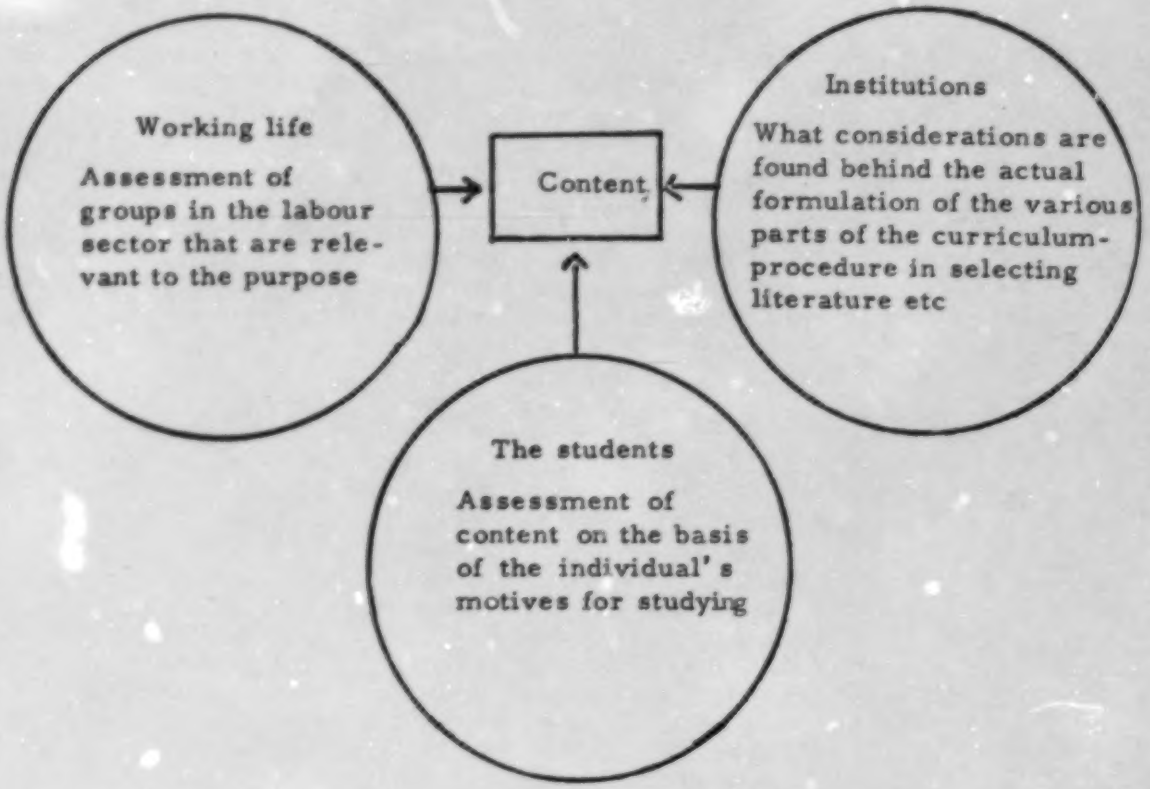
Working life
Assessment of groups in the labour sector that are relevant to the purpose
Content
Institutions
What considerations are found behind the actual formulation of the various parts of the curriculum-procedure in selecting literature etc
The students
Assessment of content on the basis of the individual's motives for studying

Figure 2. Diagram for analysis of content

Literature surveys conducted hitherto and contacts with various international organizations show that very little attention has been accorded the question of how education should be organized with regard to new categories of students (e.g. ref CERI, 1977). Patricia Cross is of the opinion that it is now time to shift from an "accent on access to accent on lerning" (Cross, 1976).

Literature contains a number of results indicating that adult students, particularly those unaccustomed to studying, are sensitive to what happens in the educational situation (Hopper & Osborn, 1975, Challis, 1976).

Research on interruptions in studies have emphasized to an excessive degree the decisive importance of external factors and have failed to observe that these have in many cases functioned as catalysts in a chain of difficulties which has often been related to the layout and content of education (cf Boshier, 1973).

DELIMITATIONS

This project comprises part of the evaluation of Sweden's new system of higher education and therefore during the planning stage there is a need for a close link-up with other projects within the UHÄ follow-up programme (e.g. Dahllöf & Westin, 1977; Kim, 1977). A basis for a primary delimitation may be the alternative means of recurrent education illustrated in figure 1. Longer continous periods of education are interesting primarily in relation to alternative 1. Since this is less common and moreover would not appear to differ very much from present conditions, there is good reason to omit this type of education. Alternatives 2 and 3 primarily involve shorter courses, which in conjunction can provide full qualification. These can be organized both within the framework of the university organization and within the framework of, for example, different forms of extended higher education.

It seems also relevant, however, to study the interaction between these three alternaives as a part of the implementation of the reform. This choice and the general design of the project will be discussed within the UHÄ and the project.

AUTUMN WORK

During the summer we have commenced the mini-analysis of prerequisites that we mentioned earlier. We estimate that this will be completed and ready for presentation by the beginning of 1978.

Kjell Rubenson
Owe Nilsson
1977-11-25

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